

B&B

by miss-ute

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Summary: Could a series of unlucky mishaps for two lonely travelers end up being the very best luck of all? / Written for batesessecretservice's Banna April celebration on Tumblr ;)

1. Chapter 1

****Chapter I****

'A room for one, please,' John Bates said wearily, stepping into a little B&B in some obscure little village in the middle of the Yorkshire. His plane had landed at Manchester Airport about 6 hours ago, and despite a huge misunderstanding in the car hire office there, he had thought that he would still be able to reach his friend's estate in time for an early dinner. How wrong he had been. The car had broken down after only about 30 miles, and the only thing he'd been able to do was to leave the damn thing by the side of the road and hitchhike to the nearest village, which luckily was home to a small B&B hotel.

'We don't have any single rooms left. Only one room for two, I'm afraid,' the older woman behind the counter said. 'And you'll have to pay the full price, even though you are on your own.'

Him and his luck! 'OK, I'll take it.' This was the only accommodation the tiny village had to offer, and he was too tired to argue over a few pounds.

'Perfect! Name, please.'

'John Bates,' he answered a bit testily, well aware that his current situation wasn't her fault, but he still couldn't help feeling peeved. He was so excited to see Robert and his family after so much time had passed, and now he was stuck in the middle of nowhere. He had spent the last depressing 8 years in Ireland with his now - thank god - former wife, Vera, and since the long, drawn-out,

and very ugly divorce proceedings were finally over, his best friend had invited him to spend a few weeks with them at their large estate, Downton Abbey. John had been a little reluctant at first but Robert, being Robert, wouldn't stop nagging him until he had said yes.

'Here you go,' the woman said, handing him the key after having checked him in. 'You're in room 5. I hope you'll enjoy your short stay with us. I'm Mrs. Patmore, if you need anything or have any questions, Mr. Bates,' she smiled.

'Thank you,' he mumbled under his breath, took the key, and just as he was about to climb the stairs, he turned around. 'Is there by any chance a car repair shop in the village?'

'There is.' She happily gave him the answer that he was hoping to hear.

Thank god, John thought to himself. With any luck, he would be back on the road by tomorrow afternoon. He asked for the number of the shop, and feeling a little luckier with that information safely tucked in his pocket, he went upstairs to his room. Closing and locking the door behind him, he placed his bag by the desk and threw himself onto the bed, exhaling in relief. The last three months had completely exhausted him. Vera had refused to sign the divorce papers until he had given her his London flat. He loved the place - it had been his mother's - but he had really needed to get away from his greedy ex-wife, so had felt forced to give in to her demands.

Unbuttoning his jacket, he took his mobile from his inner pocket and dialled the mechanic's number. After a few rings, a young man voice's greeted him. The shop was already closed for the day, but after John explained to him what had happened and where the car was, the man promised he'd tow it to the shop first thing the next morning to have a look.

Feeling a bit better about the whole situation, John decided to ring Robert next, to let him know that he'd be arriving at Downton Abbey some time the next day.

'John, my good fellow! Where are you?' Robert greeted him cheerfully. 'The girls can't wait to see you after so long. I do hope you're not calling to tell me that your flight has been delayed...'

'Robertâ€|'

His friend talked on and on, not giving John a chance to answer any of his questions.

'...Robert!_' John raised his voice, hoping to interrupt his babbling.

'What?'

'My car broke down on the way from the airportâ€|'

'Where are you? Should I come and pick you up?' Robert asked immediately.

'No, don't bother. The mechanic will take a look first thing tomorrow and with any luck I'll be there before dinner,' John reassured his friend. It was already almost 6 in the evening, and he knew that it wouldn't make any sense for Robert to come and pick him up, only to have to drive him back in the morning to get the car.

'Are you sure? I can easilyâ€|'

'No, Robert, it's OK. Enjoy your dinner and say hello to the family. I'll see you tomorrow,' John replied. He hadn't see Robert in 6 months, and was looking forward to spending some time with him and the family. He and Robert had met in the army years earlier, and had quickly become best friends who knew they could always count on each other. The only reason that they hadn't seen each other on a regular basis in recent years was Vera, who was now, thankfully, part of John's past.

'All right then, we'll see you tomorrow. Bye,' Robert said, ending the call.

Tossing the phone onto the nightstand, John sat himself up and thought about what to do next. It was still early and he didn't want to spend the evening locked inside. To tell the truth, he did feel a little hungry. Standing up, he decided to change his clothes and walk around the village, in hopes of finding a proper pub to have a dinner. He lifted his bag onto the bed and unzipped it.

'What the fu-â€|?' he said under his breath, when he opened it. The bag was full of clothes that were not at all like anything of his. Jeans, colourful tops, a silky nightgownâ€|a number of pairs of lacy lingerie, and a blue garter, John noted to himself as he surveyed the contents. Whoever these things belonged to, she was anticipating a busy weekend. Suddenly feeling uncomfortable at looking through a stranger's things, he let go of the garter he had picked up. Wondering how he could have ended up with the wrong piece of luggage, he noticed that this bag looked very much like his - small, brown, and the same brand. When he'd claimed the bag at the airport, he hadn't bothered to check it, since it was the last one on the carousel.

'Nice job, John, you have managed to take the wrong bag and hire the worst car in the whole of Britain, all in the space of one day,' he berated himself, closing it again and sitting back down on the bed. Turning the bag around, he hoped that the owner's contact information was written on the tag.

'A. Smith,' he read aloud, tracing the name with his finger. What a very unremarkable name, he thought briefly. There was a London address and, luckily, a phone number. Without losing any time, he dialled the number and waited for the voice mail. After leaving a brief message, he walked downstairs to ask Mrs. Patmore where he could find a pub. He was almost at the bottom of the stairs when he heard an unfamiliar voice.

'You have to be kidding me! Are you sure you have no more rooms available?' a soft voice asked.

'I'm sorry, miss, but I just filled the last one a few minutes

ago.'

'Does the pub have any rooms?' the woman persisted, in hopes that she might locate some kind of accommodation for the night.

'I'm afraid not.'

'Any private homes with rooms or couch surfers? Please - I'll take anything I can get. I have had a long, shitty day and now I have nowhere to stay.'

'I'm sorry, but I can't help y-â€|'

'Oh, come on!' Her voice rose in frustration. 'My hired car broke down, my phone is dead, and I've walked 2 miles in the rain, in high heels, to get here, so I'm begging you, please get me some kind of bed. I'll take _anything!_'

'Miss, I'll have to ask you to calm down,' the older woman said, staring at her.

'I'm sorry, I'm sorry.' She exhaled, trying to calm herself down. 'It's just...it's been a really long day, and all I need is a hot shower and a bed. Is that too much to ask?'

'No, it's not, but I don't have any more rooms left to offer you, soâ€|' John coughed, causing both of the women to stop talking and turn to him. 'Mr. Bates, can I help you? Is there a problem with your room?'

'No, no,' John smiled. 'My room is perfect, thank you, Mrs. Patmore.' My god, she was beautiful, he thought to himself, gazing at the young woman. Her long blonde hair was wet, and he could see that her jeans and heels were caked with mud. But regardless of her outward appearance, she was absolutely breathtaking.

'Mr. Bates?'

'Umm...yes?' He slowly pulled his attention away from the blonde and turned to look at the older woman.

'Are you feeling alright?'

'Yes, yes. I'm OK, thank you. I didn't mean to eavesdrop, but I overheard your dilemma about rooms, and I might have a solution for you.'

'Really? I'll take it!'

'What? You don't even know what I'm going toâ€|' John began, chuckling, when she interrupted him and took a step toward him.

'Please - I don't care, I'll take anything.' She took another step closer and her blue eyes stared back at him. Even though he didn't know a thing about the woman, he could feel his knees getting weak, just having her so close to him.

'OK.' He smiled. 'Mrs. Patmore, can you please put Missâ€|' He turned back to the young woman with questioning look.

'...Smith, Miss Anna Smith.' She smiled, impatient to hear his offer.

'I can put Miss Smith in my room. I can sleep on the couch in your sitting room.'

'What?' the older woman said. "I'm sorry, Mr. Bates, but I couldn't allow that. The sitting room is a common area for all the guests."

"Mr. Bates, it's very kind of you to offer me your room, but I couldn't accept if it meant that you wouldn't have a place to sleep yourself."

"I don't mind, really...perhaps I could find some other..." John pondered, but Miss Smith interrupted.

"There are two of us and just one room that sleeps two," she said. "I have a rather unorthodox solution - we could share the room."

John rubbed the back of his neck uneasily, but truthfully he could see no other solution, either, given the circumstances. "Well...if you would really be OK with that, maybe we could make it work..."

'But you've just met the lass, Mr. Bates,' interjected Mrs. Patmore, "...and you are not married. I don't think I can..."

'Mrs. Patmore...' John walked past Anna and leaned on the counter. 'I'm a much older man, and you and I both know that I'd never have a chance with this lovely young woman here. So believe me when I say that you don't need to worry about anything improper,' he reassured her with a warm smile.

'I don't know...' she said, worriedly. The B&B she and her husband had owned for years was old, but they were both respected people in the village. Heaven knows she did not want to take any chance of their fellow villagers thinking that they were running a...a brothel...or some other unsavoury establishment!

'Please, Mrs. Patmore...' Anna quickly joined John at the counter. 'I promise you, nothing untoward will happen. I just want to shower and get some rest.'

The older woman's eyes narrowed, moving from Anna's face to John's, then back again. Was she really considering this? They didn't even know each other; they were strangers who had met just a few minutes ago. The last thing she needed was for her hotel to become known as...well...as a house of ill repute! But looking at the desperate young woman, something inside told her that maybe she should bend the rules this time. 'All right, just this once, but...'

'Thank you!' Anna squeaked, so relieved that she wasn't going to have to spend the night outside in the rain.

'BUT...' Mrs Patmore said. 'If I hear anything going on, anything at all, I'll throw you out on your ear...both of you...in the middle of the night, if I have to. Understood?'

'Understood!' Anna and John said simultaneously, like children promising to be on their best behaviour.

'Good. Come on, now get upstairs before anyone sees you...or before I change my mind!' she scolded them and nodded toward the staircase.

'May I?' John asked, extending his hand toward Anna's bag.

'Thank you,' she replied, and as she handed it to him, their hands touched lightly. It was quick, but they could both feel a slight tingle go through their bodies. Somewhere in the recesses of his brain it registered that the bag looked surprisingly similar to his own, but Anna's presence was making it hard for him to think about anything but her.

'And tha- thank you,' she stuttered at Mrs Patmore, whose face showed that she was still a little sceptical about the whole arrangement.

'Miss Smith, are you coming?' John's voice called from the stairs.

'Yes, I'm coming,' she replied, giving the woman one last smile before disappearing after him.

They quietly made their way down the hall and as John was about to unlock the room, he turned to her. 'Ummâ€|'

'Yes?' she stared back.

'Are you sure you're OK with this? I mean, are you comfortable staying in a room with a complete stranger?'

'It's Mr. Bates, right?'

'Yes.'

'Look, I know this whole thing is a little strange. I can assure you that I would never do it if I had another option, but as you can see I'm soaked from head to toe, and all I need is a quick shower and a good night's sleep. Besides, you look safe enough to me.' She grinned and bit her lower lip.

Was she flirting with him, John thought to himself, but quickly quashed that thought and smiled back. 'OK, if you are sure.' He pushed the key into the keyhole. 'And for your information, yes, I'm safe,' he joked, unlocking the door and pushing it open.

Entering the room, he placed her bag next to the door and moved out of the way so she could walk in. 'Ohh...' he heard her say, and he turned to face her, asking, 'Is there a problem?'

'Ummâ€|' She stopped just inside the doorway, and chuckled nervously at the sight of the big double bed in the middle of the room. 'It's nothing, it's just that...I thoughtâ€|'

'Yes?'

'...I assumed...that this would be a room with two twin beds, that's all.' She felt kind of silly saying this, considering that she had just said she was OK sharing a room with a complete stranger.

'Oh, right...' He smiled shakily. 'Well, I was thinking that I could sleep on the floor. It's not a prob-â€|''

'Mr. Batesâ€|'' The way she said his name warmed him in the most pleasant way. 'â€|don't be ridiculous. You were here first, and I could never let you spend the night on the floor.'

'So what are we going to do?''

'Nothing,' she grinned. 'I'll take the chance of being a little racy tonight, and we can share the bed. All you have to do is to act like a gentleman.' She nudged him playfully, making John's temperature rise for just a little bit.

'May I?' She nodded toward the open bathroom door.

'Sure,' he responded, and silently observed her taking her bag into the bathroom and locking the door. This is going to be one interesting night, John thought to himself, and sat down on the bed.

* * *

><p>BETA: ANNAMBATES! :) THANK YOU

Tell me what you think! thanks for reading :))

2. Chapter 2

Chapter II

'Are you hungry?' John asked, through the closed bathroom door.

'What?' With the shower running, she couldn't hear what he was saying.

'I asked, _are you hungry_?' he repeated a little louder this time, leaning on the doorframe.

Finally turning the water off, she stepped out the shower and wrapped herself in a towel, once again calling, 'What did you say?''

Laughing to himself, he patiently repeated the question. 'Are you hungry?''

'Well, to tell the truth, I am,' she said, looking at herself in the mirror. It felt so nice to be clean again. 'Any ideas?''

'I was planning to go to the pub. Would you like to go with me?''

'My, my, Mr. Bates...you do work fast. First asking me to stay the night in your room, now dinner. If I didn't know better, I'd think

you were trying to get me into bed.'" He heard her chuckle.

'What? No, no! I didn't mean...ummmâ€|I just thoughtâ€|'' He straightened himself up and really hoped that she hadn't taken his offer the wrong way.

'Relax, I'm just kidding,' she laughed, after hearing his worried voice through the door. She didn't know a thing about the man, only his name, but something about his demeanour made her feel like she could trust him. He was different, and it just felt right talking to him, teasing himâ€| OK, she may have even flirted with him a little bit, but he hadn't seemed to mind. 'So, sure. Let's go to the pub and have dinner, but I'm buying,' she added, drying her hair with a towel.

'We'll talk about that later,' he smiled, well aware that there wasn't a chance he would be letting her pay for their dinner.

'So, are you here for just one night orâ€|'' he heard her ask, and just when he was about to answer, a shriek from inside the bathroom made him jump. 'Miss Smith, are you all right? Did you slip? ' If the door hadn't been locked, he was certain that he would have barged in to make sure she was OK. 'Anna?' he called again, when she didn't answer.

'Yes, yes, I'm all right. It's justâ€|''

'What is it?' What in the world was going on in there, he wondered, waiting for her to finish her sentence. 'Anna?'

But instead of answering, she unlocked the door and hurried out of the bathroom, wearing only a white towel around her body and carrying her bag. 'My clothes are gone!' she exclaimed, walking past him, not seeming at all bothered by the fact that she was almost naked. 'I don't get it! Where are my clothes?!'

John stared at her with his mouth hanging open, not saying a word. She literally took his breath away. The towel she was wearing ended mid-thigh, and my god - she looked good, and smelled even better! His eyes lingered on her exposed collarbones, and for a second he wished he could kiss them.

'Mr. Bates... Mr. Bates?' Her soft voice brought him back to reality.

'Yeah?' He finally looked her in the eye and hoped that she hadn't noticed him staring.

'Are you OK?'

'Yesâ€|'' He coughed and felt his cheeks blazing. 'What happened?'

'I don't know! This is my bag, but these are not my clothes!' she replied.

'They're not? How did they end up in your bag?' he asked.

'I don't know,' she said. 'I mean, don't get me wrong - whoever owns them has great taste - but I can't wear this.' She pulled a

very familiar checked shirt out of the bag. Suddenly it dawned on him - had Anna picked up his bag at the airport instead of her own?

He then recalled the "A. Smith" he had rung earlier about the bag he had ended up with. My god, if that was her bag, that meant thatâ€|those were her lace bras and knickersâ€|her blue garter... For a moment he thought that he was going to faint.

'Great taste, huh? And how do you know that?' he asked shakily.

'Well, first of all, he wears boxers, see?' Anna pulled a few pairs out of the bag. 'And by the size of them, he really fills them well,' she grinned.

John was certain that his face must be completely crimson by now. He cleared his throat. "Anna, about those clothes..." he began, but she was so focused on checking out the contents of the bag that she didn't seem to hear him.

'Let's seeâ€|gorgeous ties, smart shirts and trousersâ€| Oh, he even owns some waistcoats - I love waistcoats! More men should wear them, don't you think?' She looked up and smiled at him.

'Yeah, sure," John nodded, curiosity starting to get the better of him. He couldn't help but wonder what else she would say about his clothes. "Umm...go on. Tell me more about this mysterious person...''

'I don't know...I mean, I'm going through some strange man's wardrobe,' she laughed.

'Well, it feels like a lot of things this evening have to do with strangers, so I don't think he would mind,' he replied playfully, his eyes twinkling, and for the first time, Anna felt something move inside of her. His beautiful hazel eyes stared back at her and she could see that a spark had lit up inside of them.

'OK, but if this stranger finds out, I'll blame you,' she giggled. She went back to looking through the bag. 'If you ask me, he is someone who really loves what he does, maybe something...studious...to do with books, perhaps, but at the same time he enjoys spending his free time doing something completely different.'

'Like what?''

'I don't know, but I'd guess something skilled and delicate, working with his hands...maybe woodwork or carpentry, I think.'

How in the world did she know that, he thought to himself, completely shocked. Everything she had said was true. He earned his living as a book editor, but whenever he had some spare time, he loved to spend it with his woodworking tools, making little wooden boxes and things like that. 'How do you know that?''

'Well, I've worked in fashion for the last 12 years, and I've always had a knack for telling a lot about people just by looking at their wardrobes.'

'Really?'

'Yes.' She bit the inside of her cheek. 'You don't believe me, do you...'

'Oh, believe me, I do,' he responded seriously.

'No, you don't,' she laughed, and before he could protest, she continued, 'Come on, open your bag and I'll tell you who you are.'

"Umm, Anna...about the bags..." he began again, desperate to explain before she discovered her own clothes in 'his' bag, but he was immediately interrupted by the shrill ringing of the phone on the desk.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Mr. Bates?"

"Mrs. Patmore...?"

"Yes, well...errrr...I just wanted to see how you two were getting on...and to remind you that I don't want any sort of funny business going on in that room tonight. I have a reputation to maintain, you know!"

"Yes, Mrs. Patmore...we've discussed this already..." Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Anna walk to the wardrobe, where he had stashed the other bag, and pull it out.

"Right, Mr. Bates...as long as we understand each other. Thank you..." He quickly put the receiver back down.

"Anna, the thing about the bags is that..."

'Oh, we have the same type of bag,' he heard her say, but before he could explain further, she had unzipped it.

'Well, Mr. Bates...I have to say you really have unusual taste,' she teased, but her expression quickly turned serious when she realized that it was her own clothes she was staring at. She frowned in confusion. 'Are these myâ€|'

'Yes, I think they are,' John interrupted, and quickly added, 'The thing is...I think that I have your bag and you haveâ€|'

'I can see that!' her usually soft, gentle voice had developed a hard edge, and he could see distrust and even fear in her eyes. 'Who are you?' she demanded, moving away from him.

'Annaâ€|' He took a step toward her.

'Take another step and I'll scream for help!' she warned, feeling trapped. Of course he was just another pervert! She should have known better than to trust him; she never had any luck when it came to men.

'No, no, Anna, listen - this is just a little misunderstanding...'

'I'll _bet_ it is!'' She took another step away from him.

He could see that she was about to scream blue murder any second now, so he quickly blurted out, 'The only reason I have your things is because I think that you must have taken my bag at the airport.'

Staring back at him, she was completely confused. 'Beg your pardon?'

'Look, I don't know how, but I think you must have somehow managed to take my bag instead of yours at baggage reclaim. I'm guessing that you flew from London to Manchester today?'

Still confused, she nodded her head in response. 'So did I. So, you see, I think that you took mine and I took yours without even realizing. Look...' He went to his bag and showed her the label with his name and address on it. 'And if you don't believe me, check your voice mail. I left you a message earlier, saying that I have your bag and that you should call me back. Only your tag just says 'A. Smith,' so I didn't put two and two together until just a few minutes ago.'

'Thank god!' she exhaled, after it had all sunk in. 'I thought that you were some kind of a stalker or maybe even worse. Sorry,' she apologized, finally stepping away from the wall.

'No problem.' He smiled back at her, feeling relieved.

'But you don't mind me checking my phone, do you?' She had to be 100% sure that he was telling the truth.

'Sure,' he chuckled. 'Please do.'

Walking past him, she plugged in her phone and quickly realized that he had, in fact, rung her about the mix-up, before they had even met. 'Sorry I didn't believe you.' She looked up, feeling a little embarrassed for having made a scene.

'Forget about it, I get it.' He gave her a reassuring smile.

'So...how long did you know it was me?'

'Since you held up my shirt. I tried to tell you, but I couldn't get your attention - I think you were enjoying looking through my things.' Anna blushed, but he just smiled. 'Once you started guessing about me from my clothes, I must admit that I was curious about what else you would say. And then when I tried again to explain, Mrs. Patmore rang and...'

'Oh, my god!' She could feel her cheeks redden when she remembered what she had said about his clothes. 'I'm sorry about going through your things and saying all that...' She was mortified, especially because of the comment she'd made about his boxers.

'It's all right. I should have stopped you, but once you started, I was interested in what else you'd say,' he grinned. 'Your guesses were actually quite on target. And we're kind of even now - I admit

that I peeked at your things just a bit, too.'

'Oh? And what did you discover?' she laughed, looking away, well aware of what she had packed.

'Some very, very nice things,' he said softly, gazing at her. She was much shorter than he, but she looked so lovely.

The energy in the room shifted. Looking up, she saw him staring at her, and she could feel her heart skip a beat. He really was handsome - beautiful hazel eyes, dark hair, soft lips, a day-old stubble. He was wearing a black shirt with the top two buttons open, giving her a tantalising glimpse of his chest hair.

'Nice things, hmm?" she said coyly. "Can you try and tell me something about the person who wears them?'

'OK.' He smiled and took a step toward her. 'Umm, she is definitely a beauty - perfect body, gorgeous face,' he whispered. Anna froze, trying to understand this feeling between them. They had just met, but it felt like they had known each other for years.

'Blonde hair, ocean-blue eyes, milky skin...' he continued, with no idea what was making him act this way. He coughed, staring at her lips, wishing he could taste them, but knowing that he didn't have any right to do so.

'Go on...' she encouraged, leaning closer to him, her eyes half-lidded. He had her under some kind of a spell, but she wasn't complaining. In fact, she was mesmerised, and it felt wonderful.

'She works in fashion,' he chuckled, and saw her smile. He knew that he shouldn't, but something made him lean closer to her so their faces were just a few inches apart. 'And by the look of her lingerie and garter, she has someone very special waiting for her at home.' He had to find out whether she was single, even though he knew there was little chance.

'She doesn't have anyone...' she managed to say, resting her palms on his chest.

'Are you sure?' he asked huskily, as one of his hands drifted to her waist.

'Mhm,' she nodded, and raised herself on her tiptoes to close the gap between them. She was close enough to feel his breath on her lips, when her mobile's ringtone cut through the silence. They jumped apart and she quickly apologized, picking up her phone. As Anna talked, John had no idea what to do, so he grabbed his bag and disappeared into the bathroom to have a quick wash and change of clothes before going to dinner, if the dinner was, in fact, still happening.

The next 10 minutes were spent in complete silence. Anna ended her call, and took advantage of John being in the bathroom to put some clothes on. What in god's name had just happened here? He had been so close that she had felt his body heat on her bare skin, his scent invading her nostrils. He was a complete stranger to her, yet

something about him made her feel like being with him was the most natural thing in the world.

'Damn you, Mary!'' she said under her breath, remembering how close they had been to kissing just before her friend had rung. Pulling her jumper on, she heard knocking on the bathroom door. 'Mr. Bates?'

'Can I come out? I mean, are youâ€|are youâ€|'' For just a moment, he considered just spending the entire night locked in the bathroom. What had he been doing?! He had just divorced his crazy wife, and here he was making a move on this beautiful woman, who was far too young for him, no doubt. Pull yourself together, Bates, he repeated to himself, gathering the courage to face her again.

'Yes, I'm decent,' she assured him, before he emerged from the bathroom as slowly as he could.

'Are we still going to the pub for dinner?'' he asked tentatively.

'Why shouldn't we?'' she smiled, trying to act casual.

'I don't know, just making sure you still want to go.' He relaxed a bit when he saw that she didn't appear to be feeling uncomfortable.

'I do.' She took her handbag and walked toward the door. 'Coming?'

'Yes, sure,' he said, grabbing his jacket and opening the door for her. They walked in silence down the stairs, and just as they were about to leave the B&B, Mrs. Patmore's voice made them stop and turn around.

'Mrs. Patmore, is there a problem?'' John asked, starting to feel a little irritated by the old-fashioned woman and her old-fashioned ways.

'Well, yes and no, Mr. Bates. You see, I was wondering if you two would do me a favour?'

'Sure, what is it?'' Anna replied politely, sensing that John was getting frustrated with the woman.

'Could you please pretend that you are married when you are outside of this house?'

'What?!'' John's eyes almost popped out of his head.

'It's just...this is a small community, and I really don't need people in the village talking about me renting my rooms toâ€|you knowâ€|_unmarried_ people,' she whispered, looking around to make sure that none of the other guests could hear the conversation.

'Look, Mrs. Patmore, I'm very grateful to you forâ€|'' John began, but Anna interrupted, saying, 'Certainly, Mrs. Patmore, don't worry.' She gave her a smile and took John's large hand in her small one. 'No one will ever find out about our little secret.'

'Oh, thank you, lass,' the older woman replied. 'But just remember - you are only pretending,' she added, and before John could say anything at all, she disappeared into the back room.

'What was that all about?' John turned in disbelief to Anna, who just giggled and pulled him out the door, saying, 'Come, Mr. Bates, let's find that pub. Mrs. Bates is starving!'

* * *

><p>beta: ANNAMBATES! :)))))) THANK YOU!

and THANK YOU FOR READING! :**

End
file.